

VZCZCXRO0081
OO RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHSK #0044 0241519
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 241519Z JAN 08
FM AMEMBASSY MINSK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6833
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1802
RUEHBS/USMISSION USEU 0265
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

C O N F I D E N T I A L MINSK 000044

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/23/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAO](#) [BO](#)
SUBJECT: REGIME FREES SECOND POLITICAL PRISONER

REF: A. MINSK 033 (NOTAL)
[1](#)B. STATE 7203 (EXDIS)
[1](#)C. 07 MINSK 934

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary -----

[1](#)1. (C) Political prisoner and Malady Front Chair Dmitriy Dashkevich was freed late January 23. Dashkevich, who was originally incarcerated in 2006 for participation in an unregistered organization, is the second of Belarus' internationally recognized political prisoners to be freed in less than one week. Dashkevich's father, Vyacheslav, confirmed his son's release in a telcon with Poloff, thanking the U.S. people and the Embassy for their care and concern. The Ambassador met January 24 with Nikolay Avtukhovich, who had been released January 18. End summary.

Malady Front Leader Dashkevich Set Free -----

[1](#)2. (C) Dmitriy Dashkevich, the head of Malady Front imprisoned since November 2006 for participating in an unregistered organization, was released from Shklov Penal Colony No. 17. Poloff spoke with Dashkevich's father, Vyacheslav, who confirmed that his son had been freed. Vyacheslav Dashkevich told Poloff that he had spoken with his son who had been taken to the Orsha train station and was on his way back to Minsk. The elder Dashkevich thanked the people of the United States "who fight for freedom," and embassy staff for their concern for his son's case.

[1](#)3. (C) Dashkevich held a press conference in Minsk January 24, which Poloff attended. In the course of his remarks he noted that he had received visits from a clergyman during his incarceration and had managed to remain healthy. Dashkevich spoke briefly to Poloff following the press conference; he, too, thanked the embassy for its engagement on his behalf, calling it a "decisive factor" in his release.

Early Reactions Credit International Community Pressure -----

[1](#)4. (SBU) Former opposition presidential candidate and leader of the "For Freedom" movement Aleksandr Milinkevich credited pressure from civil society and from the international community for Dashkevich's early release. In a statement carried by the independent press, Milinkevich said that the release of Dashkevich and of Nikolay Avtukhovich (refs A and B), whom Ambassador met January 24 (septel) "in no way lessens the anti-people, police-state character of the political regime" in Belarus.

Comment

15. (C) Since only two months ago Dashkevich faced additional charges that could have extended his jail term significantly (ref C), his release yesterday -- and the release of Avtukhovich January 18 -- represent a change of course by the Belarusian regime. The magnitude and sincerity of any such shift will be judged ultimately by the release of the remaining political prisoners by mid-February, as well as by the treatment that the state shows to opposition politicians, activists, and journalists in the future.

STEWART